



November 2019

A close look at
Nintendo's innovative
Ring Fit Adventure

LEGO Duplo World

**Toca Life World
Haunted House**



On the cover: **LEGO Duplo World** by StoryToys

**Children's Technology Review
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Blox 3D Junior*
Card City Nights
Card City Nights 2*
DEVAR Augmented Reality Books
Discovery Tour: Ancient Greece by
Ubisoft
Legend of Zelda, The: Link's
Awakening*

LEGO Duplo World*
Look, I'm Making it Up!
Mario Kart Tour
Mystik Belle
Pan-Pan, A Tiny Big Adventure
Project Oikos by Ubisoft
Rabbids Coding by Ubisoft
Ring Fit Adventure*
Snake Pass*
Toca Life World: Haunted House*
Toon Blocks
XBox All Access



* Denotes "Editor's Choice."

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"There is no normal life that is free of pain. It's the very wrestling with our problems that can be the impetus for our growth." — Fred Rogers, from "The World According to Mister Rogers: Important Things to Remember."

Dear CTR Subscriber --

In just a few days I'll be huddled up with a group of children's interactive media reviewers and publishers to assess the last 12 months, as the 19th annual Dust or Magic Institute takes place. Once again we'll be inspired by the work of Fred Rogers, as we explore ways to "make goodness attractive" with the latest digital tools. Examples of this goodness are easy to find in this November issue.

Don't overlook Toca Life World: Haunted House, as well as the new LEGO Duplo World by StoryToys (pictured on the cover). Both use subscription models, but do so in a way that doesn't trick children.

The product that is especially worth noting this month is Nintendo's innovative Ring Fit Adventure. This exercise experience puts you in the shoes of your in-game Avatar -- pairing your actual motions with game mechanics and a system. After each level, the Switch Joy-Con's IR Motion Sensor can measure your pulse by placing your thumb over it, letting you know your heart rate and whether you can go a little harder or should slow down your pace if it's too high. This attention to detail is valuable, and works behind the scenes to better cater to your individual workout preferences. You can customize your own workouts, and set reminders that alert you when it's time for a session. Kudos to the creative team at Nintendo for another contribution to health, and family life in general. Read more in CTREX and please comment on your own workout experience.



NEW REPORT DESCRIBES HOW OLDER CHILDREN USE MEDIA

Our data hound friend Scott Traylor had a close look at the latest Common Sense Media survey on how older children (ages 8-up) are using technology.

Read the report, at <http://bitly.com/2PwTlih>

Read Scott's interpretation on LinkedIn, at <http://bitly.com/333dCjb>

According to the report, media use of tweens and teens is up slightly, but not in a significant way (from 4 hours and 36 minutes in 2015 to 4 hours and 44 minutes in 2019). It's also up a bit more for teens (from 6:40 in 2015 to 7:22 in 2019, a 42 minute increase) but again, not a major difference. These data suggests there have not been as many significant disruptors across the media landscape for tweens and teens over the last four years.

Dust or Magic

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Feature Reviews and New Releases

NOVEMBER 2019

Here's an alphabetical listing of both the feature reviews (with ratings) and the new and future releases. "Entry Date" refers to the date we first learned of the product.

Blox 3D Junior

Blox 3D Junior is a simplified version of Blox 3D. See also Blox 3D City Creator. It turns your tablet into an easy-to-use, powerful-feeling block building experience. Just keep in mind that your "world" is limited to one screen that is about 60 by 60 by 60 blocks.

You start with an empty screen surrounded with various types of building blocks, a simple color palette and some moving items like people and vehicles.

Projects can be as simple as a tower in the desert, or as busy as a teeming city block. We'd only recommend using this app on larger screens. Work can be saved at any point. All things considered, this app is well worth the download. Made in Unity. New to this version are lesson plans and demo videos bundled in the app for teachers, plus 3D Modelling and 3D Printing options. Work can be saved as an animated movie. Created by Arjun Gupte of Appy Monkeys. Learn more at http://appymonkeys.com/Blox_3D_Junior

Details: Appy Monkeys, www.blox3d.com. Price: \$3.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: . Teaches/Purpose: creativity, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/23/2019. [buckleit]



Ease of Use	9	86 %
Educational	8	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	

Card City Nights

With a cast of humorously written characters brought together from Ludosity's previous games, this single-player, arrow-matching card game is full of personality that can be enjoyed by parents and children together, and features all the fun of collecting and playing cards for less than the price of a coffee!

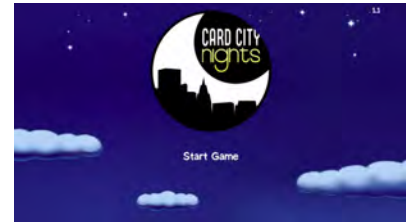
As CardPlaya, or whatever you decide to name yourself, set off into your new hometown and meet the local card-nuts. Most of the folks living in the city are raring to play cards with you. If you want to make it big and win the one million coin prize, you'll need to earn eight legendary cards from the best players across the city, and challenge The Card King!

Children learn to string together combos of three symbols or more in order to attack, defend or revive disabled cards. Each player starts with seven life, and victory is achieved by bringing your opponent's life to zero, or disabling their cards (both accomplished via attack combos) causing them to fill their 3x3 board so that they are unable to continue playing. Matches can consist of single rounds, best of three, or best of five.

Strategies are varied here, and computer players are no slouches. Children will need to learn careful and adaptable play to make it to the end of the adventure. Don't worry though, there's no penalty for losing, and opponents are happy to play you as many times as you like.

Deckbuilding is a major part of the game, and between card matches you'll definitely want to keep updating your deck with newly earned cards and create new decks to counter tricky strategies. Optional battles can be undertaken repeatedly to earn booster packs and an in-game mall offers a selection of card singles to spend your gold coins on. Worry not, In-App Purchases are completely absent, everything in-game is earned through play.

Details: Ludosity AB, <http://ludosity.com/games/>. Price: \$1. Ages: 9-up. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android, Mac OSX, Windows, Steam. Teaches/Purpose: strategy, deckbuilding, reading, puzzle-solving,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 9/23/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	8	84 %
Educational	7	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	10	



Card City Nights 2

This is a sequel to Ludosity's well-designed digital collectible card game. With new content, a revamped "match-three" game system and bigger story mode, Card City Nights 2 delivers an upgrade over the original, with new challenge runs and online multiplayer capability.

The story takes place on the Starship Frivolity, a spacefaring city-sized vessel home to inhabitants of every shape, size and species who are of course still obsessed with The Card Game, the only card game played in space according to the game's description. Pacing is the same as before: Travel the ship's various points of interest and challenge strong opponents in search of legendary cards, building your own decks into a formidable force as you go.

New mechanical changes make the card game much more interactive. Instead of two separated 3x3 boards, cards are placed by both players across a single 6x3 board, allowing strategic blocking by placing your own cards over an opponent's arrows, preventing their combos while building your own. Cards also have timers now, taking several turns once activated to resolve but making it possible to chain activated cards for longer combos. Some cards have effects that trigger for every turn they are active, some delay or tick down the timer, the design space here is more robust than before and thus there's a lot more possibilities when deckbuilding.

Online multiplayer provides cross-platform support between the mobile and Steam versions of the game. From the beginning you can build decks from the full card collection to play against others. As of this review the game is two years old and its online player base is almost nonexistent, but you can still use a password feature to connect with friends and play your best decks against one another.

If you are looking for a sizable card collecting experience, you'll love this game.

Details: Ludosity AB, <http://ludosity.com/games/>. Price: \$5 Mobile, \$8 Steam. Ages: 9-up. Platform: Windows, iPad, iPhone, Mac OSX, Android, Steam. Teaches/Purpose: strategy, deckbuilding, reading, puzzle-solving,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.4 stars. Entry date: 9/23/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	7	87.5%	
Educational	N		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	9		
Good Value	9		

DEVAR Augmented Reality Books

This is an Augmented Reality (AR) library. Titles cover Early Learning, Encyclopedias, Coloring Books and licensed books like My Little Pony. For example, in ABC 2.0 & Numbers 2.0 you point your device at the printed book to see illustrations and funny characters pop out of the page. The Age of Dinosaurs Encyclopedia includes a trip to prehistoric times with pop-up illustrations and facts.

Details: DEVAR Digital, www.devar.org. Price: \$call. Ages: 3-up. Platform: . Teaches/Purpose: reading, science, augmented relativity. Entry date: 2/14/2019.





Discovery Tour: Ancient Greece by Ubisoft

In an interesting turn, the popular but very mature-themed Assassin's Creed: Odyssey has been modified as an education and exploration tool with this second entry in their Discovery Tour series (the first being a mode packed in with Assassin's Creed: Origins). The concept of the Discovery Tour is that of a non-combatative, "virtual museum" where the player may freely explore unimpeded by story or gameplay restraints and engage with historical characters on guided tours through recreations of monuments, ancient cities and more. Requires a UPlay Account and available only for Windows computers. Also be mindful that the game requires 57 GB to install, and a modern graphics card to run well.

This time around, the Discovery Tour can be purchased as its own standalone game from the UPlay store, meaning you can enjoy the educational aspect without worry that children might stumble upon the M-rated content of the base Assassin's Creed game. The most violent Discovery Tour ever gets is when you bump into NPCs and they stumble before regaining their balance, which is more silly than anything.

As you play, you can gain rewards like new avatars for completing tours which consist of adventuring from one landmark to another, learning and being quizzed at each stop. You can change your in-game avatar from the pause menu, running about as a studied old scholar, a young girl or even the mythical Minotaur. There are also many entries which provide a hefty dose of reading material by encountering them in the game world itself.

There are very few interactive learning experiences built on such a robust framework. Discovery Tour: Ancient Greece makes its primary content educational, while still giving you a visually stunning interpretation of Greece and a smooth, exhilarating amount of control as you freely run and climb its architecture, or even fly as a bird, seeing the sights from high above. If a child is having fun while learning, the educational experience is that much more engaging, and this rare combination is on full display with Discovery Tour.

Regardless of how you feel about the violence and historical liberties taken for sake of plot in Assassin's Creed, the series has shown value in its recreations. Consider the fire the Notre Dame's roof suffered earlier this year; 2014's Assassin's Creed: Unity features a mostly faithful digital preservation of its design.

Ubisoft's decision to cater this content in an appropriate way for all ages to enjoy is admirable indeed, and we hope to see more of this modified, education-oriented content for years to come.

Details: Ubisoft, www.ubisoft.com. Price: \$20. Ages: 9-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: exploration, reading & listening comprehension, history, geography, ancient cultures, ancient theologies, mythology. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/9/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	8	86 %
Educational	8	
Entertaining	9	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	9	



Legend of Zelda, The: Link's Awakening

Twenty six years after its original release on the Nintendo Game Boy, this new Nintendo Switch edition is quality Zelda fare. You help the inhabitants of a mysterious island, collect tools, explore dungeons and defeat monsters -- all to get Link home.

Compared to the 1993 release (which we played) this 2019 remake doubles down with quality of life additions, including a revamped map with pins to mark important areas and conversation logs. Most of the '93 edition is still intact, while obsolete features, such as the photo side quest have been dropped. The spooky character Dampé has taken the camera shop's space, turning it into the Chamber Dungeon, where you can arrange rooms into new dungeon crawling challenges. You can't craft your own rooms from scratch, but each dungeon you conquer in the main game adds its rooms to the Chamber Dungeon selection.

Zelda amiibos (the collectible figures) can unlock special chambers and store dungeons to save/load, but this is an underwhelming feature.

Don't miss the chance to pluck prizes with a claw-grabber, go fishing, or fool the tool shop by sneaking out with an item. The next time you enter the shop, you'll be punished with a painful zap, and your name spoken in-game will be irreversibly replaced by the word "THIEF" as proof of your misdeed.

The world is fun to explore. Koholint is a sunny, backyard play set where characters and creatures have a toy-like plastic sheen. Some Mario creatures make guest appearances. Little details like this make Link's Awakening a special experience worth revisiting in the modern age, and one perfect for your first Zelda, or your tenth, whether you're five years old, or fifty.

Details: Nintendo of America, www.nintendo.com. Price: \$60. Ages: 5-up.
Platform: Nintendo Switch. Teaches/Purpose: puzzle-solving, reading comprehension, spatial relations. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.7 stars. Entry date: 6/11/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	10	95 %	
Educational	N		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	9		
Good Value	9		

LEGO Duplo World

Looking for a solid, bite-sized school readiness experience for your smart phone or tablet? This app will do the job, whether at home or in preschool, with a playset's worth of colorful Duplo pieces come to life. The cost for all the content we experienced is \$18 -- which includes three unique learning areas. The app starts off with the free Number Train to test the waters, then you may choose to purchase World Animals and Rescue Adventure for more fun. The app store description mentions there's more content planned for the future as well.

The simple, responsive learning games are derived from Head Start learning objectives. These dry teaching targets are nothing new, but their tactile, whimsical treatment in this app adds an essential spark.

You start by loading blocks onto train cars. As you tap number blocks, you hear numeral in a clear voice. Incorrect answers simply fall off for another try. You can either drag or drop the blocks, or tap them to hurry up. After your goal is achieved, the trains speeds to the next level (you can swipe on the train to backtrack or skip forward if you like). Other games ask you to sort by color or shape or play a game of concentration with silly animals. There's also free building areas, featuring blocks and animals from real Duplo sets. The educational validity of this experience can be enhanced by pairing the block set with the app to link the concrete with the symbolic. Other parent features include a play timer, the ability to toggle background music, and a wide range of language options. Every item in the app responds to your touch, and the background graphics move when you tilt the screen -- small features that amplify your feelings of control. Multi-touch capability allows simultaneous sorting and building to be shared by one or more children (or adults).

Each activity starts with a short description of the learning content, which can fortunately be passed over with a tap.

So why not five stars? We would've liked more control over the navigation, and some progress tracking on the main menu, so you could see which games have already been played.

Note that this app is free to play but additional content is available via in-app purchases. The app was made for the LEGO Group by StoryToys, which is part of TouchPress.

Details: StoryToys, www.storytoys.com. Price: Free, \$18 for all IAPs. Ages: 2-5.
Platform: iPad, Android, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: counting, early learning, math, logic, fine motor skills. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.6 stars. Entry date: 10/10/2019. [buckleit]



Ease of Use	9	90 %	
Educational	10		
Entertaining	9		
Design Features	8		
Good Value	9		



Look, I'm Making it Up!

In this short, interactive story, children join Camilo, an energetic, (lemur-tailed?) child over the course of an afternoon as he spends time at home with family before a visit to the park, providing his own special interpretations of activities at each stop. Camilo shows his creativity as an artist, baker and more. You can join him in the fun too with a few mini-games that offer you the same opportunity for self-expression. Play piano, decorate cookies (you can put as many hot peppers as you want on these cookies!) and dress up Camilo in funny outfits.

Camilo's wonder and desire to experiment is a breath of fresh air from feelings of anxiety and fear of judgment many people feel at any age. Making it Up is a story which encourages the positivity of improvisation.

This light storytelling style means to engage children at their own pace. Each screen is full of little interactables to play with as you follow Camilo's day. There are a few cases of repeating voice lines which can get grating, and some touch screen oddities (overly sensitive when scrolling in the costume game) during minigames, but for the most part this is a solid little app.

Details: The Melody Book, www.themelodybook.com. Price: \$3. Ages: 4-7. Platform: iOS, iPad, iPhone. Teaches/Purpose: creativity & self-expression, reading comprehension,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/6/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	8	82 %
Educational	8	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	9	

Mario Kart Tour

The popular kart racing series featuring Mario and friends now has its own free to play entry on your smart phone (with IAP and a monthly subscription option to access additional features). Race for first against players across the world on tracks from across the Mario Kart series. Requires a Nintendo account to begin playing.

While racer names are user-generated, the racers themselves are computer-controlled, an odd deception on Nintendo's part.

This mobile iteration manages to capture much of the charm and chagrin of the original: Rocket boost starts, slipstreaming and other advanced tactics to pull ahead of the competition return, and so have bob-ombs, bullet bills, blue shells and all the hazards of your typical Mario Kart circuit to keep the action unpredictable. Mario Kart fans will be immediately familiar with one-to-one recreations of their favorite stages, including their clever shortcuts.

Touch controls are rigid -- making players choose between drifting or normal steering when swiping left or right, along with a very unwieldy gyro steering option. Normal steering is easiest to control, and wide turns still result in speed boosts, but drifting is objectively the more skill-based, rewarding option though it's also easier to mess up and lose speed if not utilized properly.

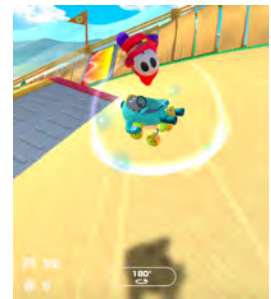
In-App Purchases present themselves in none too subtle a fashion. A cheerful cloud-riding turtle named Lakitu guides you through the process of spending Rubies (premium currency) to fire character and kart unlocks out of a pipe (loot boxes) as you've barely even put foot to pedal. Rubies can be purchased with real money, up to \$70 for 135 rubies, or roughly 30 pipe launches, which means 30 chances to get random stuff you don't know if you want. You could buy the newest Mario Kart complete with more characters, tracks and modes for \$10 less.

A \$5 monthly subscription promises double rewards from periodic gift unlocks, and grants access to the 200cc mode where the best in-game value can be obtained.

The in-game shop updates daily and provides set unlocks using coins earned through racing. Rubies can also be spent on the Coin Rush minigame where you race a golden Mario through bundles of coins (this also seems like an ironic representation of the cash cow Mario Kart Tour views itself as). You'll find rubies are not earned so quickly, and opportunities to actually get content you want are few and far between, if you know the principles of gacha games; essentially digital toy capsule vending machines, you understand what Mario Kart Tour is going for.

You can do your best to ignore the digital soliciting, and beyond it there's a decent quality, enjoyable racer here to play on the go. If you own a Nintendo console however, you'll quickly find any mainline Mario Kart title the preferable experience.

Details: Nintendo of America, Inc., www.nintendo.com. Price: Free with IAP up to \$70, Optional \$5 Monthly Subscription. Ages: 7-up. Platform: Android, iPhone, iPad. Teaches/Purpose: racing, reaction time, hand-eye coordination, competitive multiplayer,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.1 stars. Entry date: 10/4/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	8	65 %
Educational	N	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	5	
Good Value	6	



Mystik Belle

This spooky puzzle platformer is perfect for Halloween, but it has some rough spots. You move a young witch-in-training, Belle MacFae to find ingredients for a special potion as you avoid ghouls and solve puzzles. This requires flicking fireballs from her wand to fend off Frankenstein's Monster or a three-headed Rat King.

Besides finding various items, you'll need to solve puzzles or combine the parts you find into convoluted contraptions. Usually this is easy enough as long as you pick up items and keep characters in mind as you play, but a few puzzles can leave you stumped.

Another frustration comes from raccoon enemies who can steal your inventory items. You can reclaim stolen items from a small crawl space nearby, but this isn't obvious and you may not even realize an item has been stolen. We also noted some inappropriate language. There is a kid-friendly filter in the options menu. We played on the Wayforward-published version (rated E10+) available on Xbox One and PS4, which by default have toned-down language. Also, some monster designs may be a little scary for children, like a giant spider and some zombie-like enemies. Nothing we noticed goes too far into the realm of gruesome.

Despite its hiccups, *Mystik Belle* comes away as a unique, puzzling Halloween-themed adventure game, perfect to get into the scary spirit.

This game includes work by pixel artist Andrew Bado, who is also the developer.

Details: Last Dimension Inc., . Price: \$15. Ages: 9-up. Platform: Steam, PlayStation 4, Xbox One. Teaches/Purpose: exploration, spacial relations, puzzle solving, reading comprehension,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4 stars. Entry date: 10/23/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	7	77.5%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	8	
Good Value	8	

Pan-Pan, A Tiny Big Adventure

As an unnamed, castaway astronaut, you awaken from a crash to a set of bearded inhabitants attempting to repair your ship, and begin your trek through a perplexing plain of environmental storytelling and whimsical tunes to find the parts they need to get you back to spacefaring. This is how *Pan-Pan* begins, and each puzzle solved draws you further into its virtual world as reward.

Interactions are simple, using single button presses to pick up items and operate strange machinery dotting each area. Rooms themselves are engaging microcosms of problem-solving that can be approached in any order you feel most comfortable. Cozy's the word here, but there's plenty of intrigue too as you discover increasingly tough problems to solve and encounter the planet's mild inhabitants.

This is a game that can be enjoyed at your own pace. Whether you've got time for just a quick puzzle or a few full areas, it's up to you. Some downsides are the game's rather short length and lack of replayability, however what's here is enjoyably brain-teasing. You won't be blazing through some of the tougher head-scratchers at play, but the satisfaction of coming back to overcome that puzzle that had you stuck is a great feeling.

Details: SPELKRAFT, <https://www.spelkraft.com/about/>. Price: \$3 iOS, \$5 Switch, \$13 Steam. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Nintendo Switch, Steam, iPhone, iPad, Mac OSX, Windows. Teaches/Purpose: puzzle-solving, exploration, symbol recognition,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.2 stars. Entry date: 10/6/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	9	82.5%
Educational	N	
Entertaining	8	
Design Features	9	
Good Value	7	



Project Oikos by Ubisoft

Your mission? To balance an ecosystem by keeping a pond clean, eating prey, avoiding predators and helping species to reproduce to keep populations in check. If any species goes extinct it's game over, and if one species overpopulates, especially the ones with an appetite, it can mean a swift extinction for their prey.

Currently a prototype, this is a co-operative multiplayer experience that is ideal for two players. You can switch on-the-fly to control the four species who inhabit pond: Birds, fish, worms and water lilies.

You have full control over your actions, so if a bird player wants to dive bomb and eat all the fish in the pond, you can easily do so. You can also see your co-op partner, meaning if they happen to be edible for you, you can sweep down and unceremoniously eat them. No worries though, on death you respawn immediately controlling one of the remaining creatures. Though you'll likely lose playing these ways, this kind of open-ended play allowing for experimentation is good to see, and provides a lesson in its own way: Being 'the best' or competing at the game isn't necessarily good for the ecosystem. You have to think about yourself in the context of the whole, and how you can help keep it stable.

One situation we encountered had only two worms left alive, both controlled by humans. In a panicked moment we had to mate our worms to save the species, an awkward but laugh-inducing exchange. Just to clarify the mating is non-visual, you hold a button when close by and after a second a new creature is born, viola, the miracle of life.

We would love to see more intricacies at play as Project Oikos develops: Maybe water lilies also need a certain amount of algae in the water, so worms shouldn't eat all the plants that reduce cleanliness, lest the water lilies can't live in the environment. Even better would be different biomes as unique stages that offer insight into the delicate balance of creatures in a desert, or in the ocean.

Anticipate more coverage on this educational multiplayer game as it develops. More information available at <https://bit.ly/2OB6uGz>

Details: Ubisoft, www.ubisoft.com. Price: . Ages: 5-up. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: ecology, ecosystem balance, environmental thinking, co-operation. Entry date: 10/9/2019.



Rabbids Coding by Ubisoft

This 32 level coding game for beginners takes place on a space ship full of clever Rabbids (mutant rabbits). Beginning with simple commands to navigate Rabbids and robots to goal points, the game gradually builds its challenges alongside your expanding tool set until you're building complex if-else conditional and looping functions in the least amount of code blocks possible. If you've used Scratch or any similar drag and drop programming tool before, you'll warm up to this right away. If not, the game does a nice job explaining the fundamentals.

Some things to note: Rabbids Coding requires a membership to Ubisoft's game service, called UPlay, and as of this review, it is only available for Windows. Too bad, because this type of experience would work well on a mobile device. We liked the open-ended sandbox mode, where you can freely mess about with the commands. We made a simple unending loop where a robot infinitely dropped sausages. Another item on the wish list is a level editor where you could make your own challenges. This would increase replayability.

The bottom line? This is a solid base level introduction to programming for beginners in a playful setting.

Details: Ubisoft, www.ubisoft.com. Price: Free. Ages: 6-14. Platform: Windows. Teaches/Purpose: programming, logic, conditionals, recursion, problem solving, math. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.1 stars. Entry date: 10/9/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	9	80 %
Educational	8	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	7	
Good Value	9	



Ring Fit Adventure

Have you ever noticed that the avatar in most games get's a LOT of exercise? What if you became the Avatar? That's the idea of this innovative exercise experience. In order to move in the game or score points in the mini-games, you must use the Ring-Con (a durable silicon-coated spring the size of a miniature hula hoop) and Leg Strap accessories. They let you run through fields, forests and factories to stop a bad guy named Dragaux (pronounced like Drag-O). This isn't the first attempt to gamify workouts. Remember the Kinect? And there was the Wii Fit, back in 2008. Ring Fit Adventure frees your body and instead focuses its hardware on a simple, sturdy resistance ring gives you the chance to move your upper, lower and core muscles. It's a great help that the motion controls, while still sometimes missing the beat on more subtle or nuanced movements, feel more responsive in their positive in-game feedback.

Several modes are present, each with the end goal of keeping you in the habit of regular exercise. A world-spanning story mode is recommended for half-hour to hour long sessions as you reclaim abilities for your personified ring friend, aptly named Ring, and fend off Dragaux as he spreads monsters through the land. A selection of minigames are good for quick five to ten minute play sessions, and customizable workout routines allow you to tailor your own personal workout from the game's full exercise catalogue. You can set weekly reminders to alert yourself when you want to set time aside for an exercise session, and if you just want to settle down for more passive exercise, you can put your Switch to sleep and do up to 500 reps on the Ring-Con which can be redeemed for extra experience points the next time you play. Coins earned through story levels can be used to buy stat-boosting, restorative smoothies or ingredients to later blend your own with one of Ring's abilities, and a wardrobe of workout attire can be bought to make yourself look like a clashing pastel-clad aerobics instructor straight out of a VHS tape from the late 80s.

The game pays special attention to your workouts. Each session begins with a dynamic stretch warm up and ends with a static stretch cool down, and the latter will change to accommodate which muscles you worked hardest during that session, the game offers tips and recommendations for future sessions as well. After each level, the Switch Joy-Con's IR Motion Sensor can measure your pulse by placing your thumb over it, letting you know your heart rate and whether you can go a little harder or should slow down your pace if it's too high. This attention to detail is valuable, and works behind the scenes to better cater to your individual workout preferences. The game assigns an initial difficulty number to you when you first create your profile by asking your gender, age and weight, but this can be tweaked any time as you desire for more or less challenge. This affects increasing repetitions for each exercise and other aspects of exercise intensity.

Our first session -- in eagerness to cover the game's different systems -- left us exhausted and sore for the next two days after, but jumping back in felt right, and an encouraging message pre-warm up stated that the first two days are the hardest. Little pep talks and cheers like this really instill the positivity of self-improvement through the struggle of committing to something new and difficult, and through the soreness made us want to stick with the game. You may feel silly and even awkward performing some exercises, but even the skeptical may find there is something worthwhile to how Ring Fit Adventure has renovated the workout game formula.

Younger children can use the ring, but make sure that the workout intensity isn't too much for them.

Details: Nintendo of America, Inc., www.nintendo.com. Price: \$80 (includes game, Ring-Con & Leg Strap). Ages: 9-up. Platform: Nintendo Switch. Teaches/Purpose: physical education, movement, coordination, gross motor skills, timing, exercise. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.8 stars. Entry date: 9/25/2019. [Chris Guest]



Ease of Use	9	96 %	
Educational	9		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	10		
Good Value	10		



Snake Pass

This enemy-free, wiggly collect-a-thon encourages you to "Think Like A Snake!" as you help Noodle the Snake and his companion Doodle the Hummingbird to restore peace to Haven Tor, the mountainous region they call home. You use your serpent body to coil around the environment and slither through tunnels, underwater and around narrow cliff walls in search of treasures to complete each of the 15 levels. The challenges make you think differently about how to approach environmental challenges. Few games depict the natural movement and abilities of snakes, but Snake Pass makes an admirable effort. It's not perfect, Noodle's weight distribution will sometimes put you in situations you can't slither out of when hanging over open air, but it is an acquired feel and you do gradually get used to safely wrapping yourself round and round to make sure you have a grip on bamboo outcroppings. It is nice to see a video game snake depicted as jovial creature. As a coral snake himself, Noodle would in real life actually be venomous going by his stripes and the old rhyme, (red touch yellow, kill a fellow) so maybe appreciating them from a distance is safest in this instance. Nonetheless, Snake Pass is a fun exploration of a different type of animal acrobat.

Details: Sumo Digital, <https://www.sumo-digital.com/>. Price: \$20. Ages: 6-up. Platform: Windows, Xbox One, PlayStation 4, Nintendo Switch, Steam. Teaches/Purpose: Puzzle-solving, motion physics, leverage, friction, locomotion, hand-eye coordination. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/6/2019. [Chris Guest]

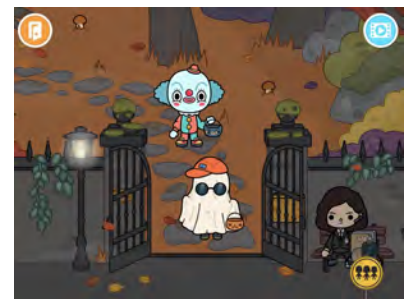


Ease of Use	8	86 %	
Educational	7		
Entertaining	10		
Design Features	9		
Good Value	9		

Toca Life World: Haunted House

Toca Life World keeps getting larger, with this Halloween themed playhouse. As with the other areas, everything you see can be moved and dropped, and many items relate in some way to other items. It is also possible to record your own narration and sound effects, for the creation of puppet show style videos. The app is easy to use, but not perfect. Testers noted that some of the items are hard to handle, e.g., when setting the table the silverware jumps to the hand of one of the characters instead of the table. Content includes a two story house, with a connecting elevator and nine new characters. After you purchase the \$1.99 world you'll see your house appear in the Morning Meadows district of Toca Life: World.

Details: Toca Boca, <http://tocaboca.com/>. Price: \$1.99. Ages: 3-12. Platform: iPad. Teaches/Purpose: language, logic, creativity, Halloween. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 4.3 stars. Entry date: 10/8/2019. [buckleit]



Ease of Use	8	86 %	
Educational	8		
Entertaining	9		
Design Features	9		
Good Value	9		



Toon Blocks

This block-based cartoon editor offers a small collection of themes to build around ranging from undersea divers to dinosaurs and characters from different regions and time periods. Two IAPs are available with monster and hero themes respectively for \$2 each.

Building scenes is easy as tapping blocks and characters into place. Holding an object allows you to rotate, scale, flip and even select the layer it's on to place characters in front of or behind buildings for example. You can also select from several backdrops for a scene, such as at night or in the desert. Once you're happy with your image, you can save and share it as a PNG file.

We found it a little too easy to activate the purchase prompts for the paid downloadable themes -- found in the cartoon screen which showcases several pre-made scenes, the bottom two rows contain the locked off content, and show a prompt to buy if you attempt to tap them.

All assets are provided for you, so you don't need to know art to make a cartoon in Toon Blocks. What's provided, plus some imagination leads to some fun scenes. Still, it would be nice if there were some options to make your own tilesets or character art. The assets themselves aren't the highest resolution either, and scaling/zooming in reveals their fuzzy, pixelated details.

There is a noticeable lack of tactile feedback. Clicking, popping or sound effects unique to each object when picking and placing them could go a long way to give cartoon creation a pleasing soundscape. For a small, free art app, Toon Blocks gets the job done, but without much verve.

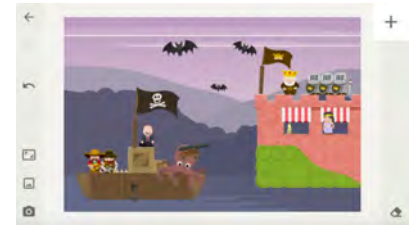
Details: Marek Dobrowolski, <https://apps.apple.com/us/developer/marek-dobrowolski/id1371689694>. Price: Free with \$2 IAPs. Ages: 6-12. Platform: iPhone, iPad, Android. Teaches/Purpose: creativity, art, drag 'n drop, cartooning,. Rating (1 to 5 stars): 3.7 stars. Entry date: 10/6/2019. [Chris Guest]

XBox All Access

An all-inclusive Xbox subscription that includes the hardware, for \$20/month for the first 24 months. The service was announced Fall 2019. The costs after the two year period were not stated. Also not stated is what happens to your saved games after your subscription expires.

Content includes one Xbox One console (works with Xbox One X for \$31/month, Xbox One S for \$23/month, or Xbox One S All-Digital Edition for \$20/month); plus one Xbox Wireless Controller, a 24-month membership to Xbox Game Pass Ultimate (includes Xbox Live Gold, online multiplayer modes and all you can play access to 100 games for console or PC. Available at Amazon.com. Games include Project Scarlett and Halo Infinite.

Details: Microsoft Corp., www.microsoft.com. Price: \$20/month. Ages: 10-up. Platform: Xbox One. Teaches/Purpose: a subscription game service. Entry date: 10/29/2019.



Ease of Use	7	72%
Educational	9	
Entertaining	7	
Design Features	6	
Good Value	7	

